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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY CALL ON PM SPIRIC

Classified By: Ambassador Charles English. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

11. (C) Ambassador English paid an introductory call on Prime Minister Nikola Spiric on October 9. Ambassador emphasized abiding U.S. interests in developments in Bosnia and a commitment to work with forward-looking Bosnian leaders who are focused on the future to realize the goal of Euro-Atlantic integration. Ambassador informed Spiric that the High Representative would soon be proposing changes to state level institutions to increase their effectiveness and urged Bosnian leaders to accept them. PM Spiric complained that the current poisoned political atmosphere did not lend itself to the success of the state or the reform agenda and that calls for the dissolution of the country are now being heard. He acknowledged that the success or failure of a police reform agreement this week would determine the speed at which Bosnia will move towards the EU and NATO. However, Spiric repeated familiar complaints that he is a largely powerless prime minister and can do little to influence the outcome of events within his government. The Ambassador urged Spiric to ensure that the SIPA Director selection process was fair and transparent. Spiric promised to work towards the appointment of a Director who can work well with the U.S. Embassy to serve Bosnia's interests. Spiric also acknowledged the need to make concrete progress on defense reform in order to meet NATO standards. End Summary.

12. (C) Ambassador, on October 9, paid an introductory visit to Council of Ministers Chairman Nikola Spiric. In his opening remarks the Ambassador emphasized that the U.S. government maintains deep and abiding interest in events in Bosnia and the success of Bosnia's Euro-Atlantic integration processes. Spiric promised to be a frank and honest interlocutor and pledged he would do his best to avoid increasing tensions in the current difficult political environment.

Political Atmosphere

13. (C) PM Spiric noted that the failure of the April package of constitutional amendments had caused great damage to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the political climate had deteriorated consistently since then. The current poisoned political atmosphere did not lend itself to the success of the state or the reform agenda. On the contrary there has been an increase in the number of voices calling for the dissolution of the country. Bosnian political leaders are incapable of countering this rhetoric with a coherent and compelling vision of the future, Spiric said. Compounding

this "political disaster" is the fact that the mechanisms for meaningful dialogue have never been created in Bosnia. While individual political leaders are adept at discussing reform with the international community there is a complete lack of substantive dialogue between Bosnians.

14. (C) The Ambassador replied that the United States is committed to continuing to work with Bosnia to lay the groundwork for progress in its path to Euro-Atlantic integration. He noted that Bosnia must meet its destiny as part of Europe and NATO. This week represents a crucial time in that process and the USG supports High Representative Lajcak in his efforts to achieve an agreement on police reform and pave the way for the initialing of a Stabilization and Association Agreement. The Ambassador praised Spiric's recent comments in support of Bosnian civic identity as the mark of a leader who could move Bosnia's state institutions forward. The Ambassador informed Spiric that the High Representative would soon be recommending some changes intended to make state level institutions more effective. The USG hopes Bosnian political leaders will accept the changes. Spiric asserted that, despite his best intentions, he is largely powerless to change this state of affairs. He inherited an essentially powerless office noting that he is the only Prime Minister in Europe who is unable to fire any of the Ministers in his Cabinet.

Police Reform Prospects

15. (C) Spiric noted that the Ambassador arrived at a particularly crucial time and in a completely dysfunctional political environment. Spiric agreed that this week would determine the speed at which Bosnia will move towards the EU and NATO. The initialing of an SAA this year would be of immense significance for Bosnia. Clearly, police reform is a key to that goal, Spiric said, but added that it is important to remember that police reform is a process. It would be simple to draft an ideal police reform agreement but such a document would be meaningless without a real commitment to implementation. Nonetheless, if the High Representative is able to broker a police reform agreement would be invaluable in refocusing political leaders on the internal situation and away from their current preoccupation with the international community.

16. (C) PM Spiric agreed that the prospects for a police reform agreement were increasingly dim unless concluded by the OHR deadline of October 15. The Republika Srpska would soon be engaged in a special elections campaign for the Presidency, a situation that would not lend itself to reform. Next year would see municipal elections and a continuation of campaign rhetoric that would not promote compromise and dialogue. Now is the time for an agreement that meets the three EU principles, Spiric concluded. Spiric lamented that without a minimum of state-level patriotism it would be impossible to reach a police reform agreement. He complained that the media have contributed to this state of affairs noting that he had never seen any objective coverage of the substance and merits of police reform. Bosnia must abandon this "politics of negation" but that it is hard to believe that interest groups will relent and allow the country to function.

17. (C) The Ambassador pointed out that the vast majority of Bosnian citizens support Bosnia's EU accession but their aspirations are frustrated by the lack of vision of their political leaders. He urged Spiric to reach out to colleagues in government and his political party to reach a compromise at this important juncture in the history of the country. Dayton allowed Bosnia and Herzegovina to break with the past. The SAA would allow the country to connect with its future. It would represent a great step forward and to lose this opportunity would be a tragedy.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador raised the selection process for a Director for the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA). He highlighted USG interest in seeing a transparent and fair process based on professional criteria. An effective SIPA is a USG priority and in selecting a qualified Director will greatly advance Bosnia's role as a country that values the rule of law.

¶9. (C) Spiric agreed that Bosnia needs a professional approach to the SIPA Director selection process. He regretted that the failure of the first selection panel had damaged the credibility of the process. Nonetheless, Spiric said he would never accept the appointment of a SIPA Director who would work against U.S. interests. He also noted that if the U.S. had a preferred candidate he would welcome an explicit declaration of that support. Spiric promised that the process would be transparent and that he would act within the law to seek the appointment of a SIPA Director who served Bosnia's interests and would work well with the U.S. Embassy.

Defense Reform

¶10. (C) The Ambassador raised defense reform and the need for resolution of defense property issues. As the primary brokers of defense reform, the U.S. is keenly interested in the completion of defense reform as the key to advancing Bosnia along the path to NATO. The U.S. looks forward to welcoming Bosnia into NATO but Bosnia must first take steps to help itself, beginning by concluding the defense property working group process, the Ambassador said.

¶11. (C) Spiric agreed that Bosnia's progress towards NATO would contribute to EU accession process and acknowledged the need to meet NATO HQ Sarajevo standards in defense property, the national defense budget and other areas. He promised to continue to do all in his power to reach an agreement and noted that the defense property working group had met in its first session on October 8. An agreement on movable property, such as arms and equipment, was clearly the first priority and must be reached quickly in order to reach NATO standards. Spiric asked for U.S. assistance in preventing the politicization of the process noting that both Bosnian politicians and some members of the international community have contributed to the problem. Spiric suggested that possible solutions could include a liquidation process, controlled by the state Ministry of Foreign Trade, with revenues going either to service entity defense debts or to supplement the state defense budget.

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